

## CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

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Child abuse is more than bruises and broken bones. While physical abuse might be the most visible, other types of abuse, such as emotional abuse and neglect, also leave deep, lasting scars. Child abuse and neglect can have lifelong implications for victims—including their well-being.

While the physical wounds heal, there are several long-term consequences of experiencing the trauma of abuse or neglect. A child or youth's ability to cope and even thrive after trauma is called "resilience" and with help, many of these children can work through and overcome their past experiences.

Children who are maltreated often are at risk of experiencing cognitive delays and emotional difficulties, among other issues. Childhood trauma also negatively affects nervous and immune system development putting children at a higher risk for health problems as adults.

More information on child abuse and neglect may be accessed through the following links.

- [KRS 156.095](#), Kentucky's legislative action to protect children from abuse and neglect
- [Federal Definition of Child Abuse & Neglect](#)
- [Major Types of Child Abuse & Neglect](#)
- [Recognizing Signs of Abuse & Neglect](#)
- [Reporting Suspected Child Abuse & Neglect](#)
- [PHYSICAL ABUSE](#)
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### KRS 156.095

The Kentucky Department of Education shall develop and maintain a list of approved comprehensive evidence-informed trainings on child abuse and neglect prevention, recognition and reporting that encompass child physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. (b) The trainings shall be Web-based or in-person and cover, at a minimum, the following topics:

1. Recognizing child physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect;
2. Reporting suspected child abuse and neglect in Kentucky as required by KRS 620.030 and the appropriate documentation;
3. Responding to the child; and
4. Understanding the response of child protective services

(c) The training shall include a questionnaire or other basic assessment tool upon completion to document basic knowledge of training components.

(d) Each local school board shall adopt one (1) or more trainings from the list approved by the Department of Education to be implemented by schools.

(e) All current school administrators, certified personnel, office staff, instructional assistants, and coaches and extracurricular sponsors who are employed by the school district shall complete the implemented training or trainings by January 31, 2017, and then every two (2) years after.

(f) All school administrators, certified personnel, office staff, instructional assistants, and coaches and extracurricular sponsors who are employed by the school district hired after January 31, 2017, shall complete the implemented training or trainings within ninety (90) days of being hired and then every two (2) years after.

(g) Every public school shall prominently display the statewide child abuse hotline number administered by the Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

### HOW IS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT DEFINED IN FEDERAL LAW?

Federal legislation lays the groundwork for State laws on child maltreatment by identifying a minimum set of acts or behaviors that define child abuse and neglect. The [Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act \(CAPTA\)](#), (42 U.S.C.A. §5106g), as amended and reauthorized by the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010, defines child abuse and neglect as, at minimum:

*“Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”*

Most Federal and State child protection laws primarily refer to cases of harm to a child caused by parents or other caregivers; they generally do not include harm caused by other people such as acquaintances or strangers. Some State laws also include a child’s witnessing of domestic violence as a form of abuse or neglect.

### **WHAT ARE THE MAJOR TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?**

Within the minimum standards set by the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act ([CAPTA](#)), each State is responsible for providing its own definitions of child abuse and neglect. Most States recognize the four major types of maltreatment:

- **Physical**
- **Neglect**
- **Sexual**
- **Emotional**

Many States also identify ***abandonment*** and ***parental substance abuse*** as abuse or neglect. While these types of maltreatment may be found separately, they often occur in combination. Circumstances that are considered as parental abuse or neglect in some States include the following:

- Prenatal exposure of a child to harm due to mother's use of an illegal drug or other substance
- Manufacture of methamphetamine in the presence of a child
- Selling, distributing or giving illegal drugs or alcohol to a child
- Use of a controlled substance by a caregiver that impairs ability to adequately care for the child

### **RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

In addition to striving to prevent a child from experiencing abuse or neglect, it is important to recognize high-risk situations and the signs and symptoms of maltreatment. If you do suspect a child is being harmed, reporting your suspicions may protect him or her and get help for the family.

**Consider the possibility of child abuse or neglect when the *child*:**

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes
- Is always watchful as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Lacks adult supervision
- Is overly compliant, passive or withdrawn
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late and does not want to go home
- Is reluctant to be around a particular person
- Discloses maltreatment

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#### **Consider the possibility of child abuse or neglect when the *parent*:**

- Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child’s problems in school or at home
- Asks teachers or other caregivers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless or burdensome
- Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention and satisfaction of the parent’s emotional needs
- Shows little concern for the child

#### **Consider the possibility of child abuse or neglect when the *parent and child*:**

- Rarely touch or look at each other
- Consider their relationship entirely negative
- State that they do not like each other

The above list may not be *all* the signs of abuse or neglect. It is important to pay attention to other behaviors that may seem unusual or concerning. In addition to these signs and symptoms, [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) provides information on the risk factors and perpetrators of child abuse and neglect fatalities.

### **REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE**

Any concerned person can report suspicions of child abuse or neglect. Reporting your concerns is not making an accusation; rather, it is a request for an investigation and assessment to determine if help is needed.

Some people (typically certain types of professionals, such as teachers or physicians) are required by State law to make a report of child maltreatment under specific circumstances—these are called mandatory reporters.

Some States require all adults to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect. Child Welfare Information Gateway’s publication *Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect* discusses the laws that designate groups of professionals as mandatory reporters.

[Kentucky’s State statute](#) requires all persons to report, including but not limited to:

Physicians, osteopathic physicians, nurses, coroners, medical examiners, residents, interns, chiropractors, dentists, optometrists, emergency medical technicians, paramedics or health professionals and:

- Teachers, school personnel, or child care personnel
- Social workers or mental health professionals
- Peace officers

#### PHYSICAL CHILD ABUSE



Physical abuse involves physical harm or injury to the child. It may be the result of a deliberate attempt to hurt the child but not always. It can also result from severe discipline such as using a belt on a child or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age or physical condition.

This type of abuse is non-accidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver or other person who has responsibility for the child.

Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Many physically abusive parents and caregivers insist that their actions are simply forms of discipline, ways to make children learn to behave. But there is a big difference between using physical punishment to discipline and physical abuse. The point of disciplining children is to teach them right from wrong-- not to make them live in fear.

#### **Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the *child*:**

- Has unexplained or frequent burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, welts, cuts or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Injuries appear to have a pattern such as marks from a hand or belt
- Shies away from touch, flinches at sudden movements or seems afraid to go home
- Wears inappropriate clothing to cover up injuries such as long-sleeved shirts on hot days
- Is always watchful and "on alert" as if waiting for something bad to happen
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Abuses animals or pets

#### **Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the *parent or other adult caregiver*:**

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing or no explanation for the child's injury or provides an explanation that is not consistent with the injury
- Describes the child as "evil" or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abuse as a child

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### NEGLECT



Child neglect—a very common type of child abuse—is a pattern of failing to provide for a child's basic needs whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene or supervision. Child neglect is not always easy to spot. Sometimes, a parent might become physically or mentally unable to care for a child such as with a serious injury, untreated depression or anxiety. Other times, alcohol or drug abuse may seriously impair judgment and the ability to keep a child safe.

Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food, shelter or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs)

Sometimes cultural values--the standards of care in the community--and poverty may contribute to maltreatment indicating the family is in need of information or assistance. When a family fails to use information and resources and the child's health or safety is at risk, then child welfare intervention may be required. In addition, many States provide an exception to the definition of neglect for parents who choose not to seek medical care for their children due to religious beliefs.

Older children might not show outward signs of neglect as they become used to presenting a competent face to the outside world and even taking on the role of the parent. But at the end of the day, neglected children are not getting their physical and emotional needs met.

#### **Consider the possibility of neglect when the *child*:**

- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations or glasses. Has untreated illnesses/injuries
- Is consistently dirty and hygiene is consistently bad (body odor, unbathed, matted hair)
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather or clothes are ill-fitting or filthy
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care. Is recurrently unsupervised or left alone
- Is frequently absent, late or missing from school
- Begs or steals food or money

#### **Consider the possibility of neglect when the *parent or other adult caregiver*:**

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

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#### SEXUAL ABUSE



Aside from the physical damage that sexual abuse can cause, the emotional component is powerful and far-reaching. Sexually abused children are tormented by shame and guilt. They may feel that they are responsible for the abuse or somehow brought it upon themselves. This can lead to self-loathing and sexual problems as they grow older—often either excessive promiscuity or an inability to have intimate relations.

While news stories of sexual predators are scary, what is even more frightening is that sexual abuse usually occurs at the hands of someone the child knows and should be able to trust—most often close relatives. And contrary to what many believe, it's not just girls who are at risk. Boys and girls both suffer from sexual abuse. In fact, sexual abuse of boys may be underreported due to shame and stigma.

Sexual abuse includes activities by a parent or caregiver such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials. Sexual abuse is defined by [CAPTA](#) as

*"The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children."*

Child sexual abuse is an especially complicated form of abuse because of its layers of guilt and shame. It's important to recognize that sexual abuse doesn't always involve body contact. Exposing a child to sexual situations or material is sexually abusive whether or not touching is involved.

The shame of sexual abuse makes it very difficult for children to come forward. They may worry that others won't believe them, will be angry with them or that it will split their family apart. Because of these difficulties, false accusations of sexual abuse are not common so if a child confides in you, take him or her seriously. Don't turn a blind eye!

Of course, just because you see a warning sign doesn't automatically mean a child is being abused. It's important to dig deeper and look for a pattern of abusive behavior and warning signs if you notice something is off.

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#### Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the *child*:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Makes strong efforts to avoid a specific person without an obvious reason
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, seductive or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease--particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment

#### Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the *parent or other adult caregiver*:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

### EMOTIONAL CHILD ABUSE



Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me? Contrary to this old saying, emotional abuse can severely damage a child's mental health or social development leaving lifelong psychological scars.

Emotional abuse (or psychological abuse) is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and therefore, child protective services may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm or mental injury to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always present when other types of maltreatment are identified such as:

- Constant belittling, shaming and humiliating a child
- Calling names and making negative comparisons to others
- Telling a child he or she is "no good," "worthless," "bad" or "a mistake"
- Frequent yelling, threatening or bullying
- Ignoring or rejecting a child as punishment--giving him or her the silent treatment
- Limited physical contact with the child—no hugs, kisses or other signs of affection
- Exposing the child to violence, the abuse of others (abuse of a parent, a sibling or even a pet)



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### Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the *child*:

- Shows extremes in behavior such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity or aggression
- Excessively withdrawn, fearful or anxious about doing something wrong
- Acts either inappropriately adult (taking care of other children) or inappropriately infantile (Rocking, thumb-sucking, throwing tantrums)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide
- Doesn't seem to be attached to the parent or caregiver

### Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the *parent or other adult caregiver*:

- Constantly blames, belittles or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- Overtly rejects the child

## CHILD ABUSE AND REACTIVE ATTACHMENT DISORDER



Severe abuse early in life can lead to reactive attachment disorder. Children with this disorder are so disrupted that they have extreme difficulty establishing normal relationships and attaining normal developmental milestones. Children with attachment disorders or other attachment problems have difficulty connecting to others and managing their own

emotions. This results in a lack of trust and self-worth, a fear of getting close to anyone, anger and a need to be in control.

A child with an attachment disorder feels unsafe and alone. So why do some children develop attachment disorders while others don't? The answer has to do with the attachment process, which relies on the interaction of both parent and child. Attachment disorders are the result of negative experiences in this early relationship. If young children feel repeatedly abandoned, isolated, powerless, or uncared for—for whatever reason—they will learn that they can't depend on others and the world is a dangerous and frightening place.

### Common signs and symptoms of reactive attachment disorder

- **An aversion to touch and physical affection.** Children with reactive attachment disorder often flinch, laugh or even say "ouch" when touched. Rather than producing positive feelings, touch and affection are perceived as a threat
- **Control issues.** Most children with reactive attachment disorder go to great lengths to remain in control and avoid feeling helpless. They are often disobedient, defiant and argumentative

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- **Anger problems.** Anger may be expressed directly, in tantrums or acting out, or through manipulative, passive-aggressive behavior. Children with reactive attachment disorder may hide their anger in socially acceptable actions like giving a high five that hurts or hugging someone too hard
- **Difficulty showing genuine care and affection.** For example, children with reactive attachment disorder may act inappropriately affectionate with strangers while displaying little or no affection towards their parents
- **An underdeveloped conscience.** Children with reactive attachment disorder may act like they don't have a conscience and fail to show guilt, regret or remorse after behaving badly

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